Conf
Pam
12mo
#930

A VOICE FROM THE AUSTRIA.

THE burning of the steamship "AUSTRIA," of the Hamburg line, bound to New York, will long be remembered as one of the most terrific calamities that has ever spread "sorrow on the sea." A finer day than the 13th of September, 1858, "never broke upon human view." The passengers crowded the deck of the magnificent vessel, and were enjoying the refreshing breeze, some engaged in various games, exercises, and pastimes, and others in cheerful conversation, when in a moment the cry of "Fire!" rang through the ship, and changed the scene into one of consternation and agony. "Women and men were praying, crying, screaming, rushing frantically about the deck, wherever they were not driven back by the smoke and flames; while others stood quietly looking on with a blank vacancy of despair upon their countenances, that was even more terrible in its ghastliness and silence than the wildest outcries." Many were suffocated and burned to death, and hundreds, to escape the flames, hurled themselves into the sepulchral waves. Out of six hundred persons on board, only about fourscore were saved by vessels that came to their rescue.

On the quarter-deck, after unavailing efforts to save the ship and to help others and themselves, there was gathered a little band of eight persons, males and females, all of whom were Christians. Two were theological students, two were clergymen, and the rest were in private life. The following extracts from the correspondence of the lone survivor of this company of believers, one of the two students of theology, are published with his consent, at the request of the writer of this tract. THEY ARE DESIGNED TO SHOW THE REALITY AND POWER OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH, AMID SCENES WHICH PUT IT FULLY TO THE TEST. Omitting in print many details which are familiar to the public, the writer says:

"I cannot refuse your request. I am no longer my own, and if my testimony can add aught to my Saviour's honor, I will not refuse to let you use it at your discretion. It was he who supported me during my struggle of four weary hours in the water, and I must not now forget him.

"After endeavoring to save the ship and some lives, I left my friend Mr. Schiebe, whose bodily strength was spent in his effort of getting from the cabin, to comfort the poor creatures who so much needed consolation. He did his work faithfully. After endeavoring to get the hatches down, the boats lowered, and the steamer with its side to the wind, and failing in all, I cut two life-preservers loose, one for Mr. Schiebe, the other for myself. As I approached him with a life-preserver, I heard a female ask him, 'What can I do?' He replied, 'Look to Jesus, he is merciful and kind. He will hear you.' But she replied, 'I can't pray.' Then he responded, 'I will pray with you;' and he offered up three or four petitions for her. At this point Miss —— came to me in great agony and asked, 'Is there any help?' I answered, 'Put your faith in Jesus.' She sat down overcome, exclaiming, 'I have no strength, no hope.' After this we gathered a small Christian band together on the quarter-deck, and after embracing each other, bid a last farewell. When I came to Miss Becker, she, weeping, said, '*The Saviour, Oh how precious he is!*'

"Our little band, after our farewell, went to the side of the vessel, determined to endure as long as possible the approaching flames, and then to leave the steamer together. Mr. Schiebe said several times to me, 'My only hope is in the Saviour;' and then looking at the raging flames and at the distant bark, he said, 'We may be saved, but I think not. If it is the Lord's will, we shall be. He knows what is best.' We gave our mutual messages to our friends, so that if either were saved, they might be assured that they were remembered by us in our dying hour. He begged me 'to tell his friends that he died happy.' 'Oh, my poor father and mother, and my dear Magda too. Let them know that I died happy.' After a few moments we heard a wild shriek at our feet, and on looking down, saw a poor fellow with his head fast in a porthole, and the flames coming over his shoulders

Pam
12mo
#930

encircling it. 'We must soon go,' I said to Mr. Schiebe. 'Precious brother,' he replied, 'farewell; a few moments, and we will meet in heaven!' We then both gave the word, 'Let us go,' and I jumped into the water. It was the last I saw of my dear friend.

"On jumping, I kept my preserver in my hand, whirling it over my head to retain my perpendicular in striking the water. On reaching the water I let go my buoy, so as not to injure myself by the strain it would produce in a leap twenty feet down. I suppose I went under the surface of the ocean twelve or twenty feet, and on coming to the surface again, saw my preserver thrown up by a wave sixty or seventy feet off and there *were* two or three parties, of two or three each, striving to gain it."

Having secured his buoy, he returned to search for his friends, but they were gone. Distracted by the shrieks and groans of the dying, whom he could not help, he swam away with the current. He then adds:

"After swimming about an hour with the sea, I found that all was quiet save the low moaning of the waves. During this time I found the promises fast clustering around me, and felt that Jesus was my elder brother. I repeated that hymn of Wesley's beginning,

"'Jesus, lover of my soul,
Let me to thy bosom fly,
While the billows near me roll,
While the tempest still is high.
Hide me, O my Saviour, hide,
Till the storm of life is past;
Safe into the haven guide;
Oh receive my soul at last.'

"For a moment I felt alone, but it was only momentary, for I soon found my Saviour with me. And such sweet consolation to know that God was my friend! I felt that he could not do but what was right. I never before could look to my heavenly Father with the same feelings of love that I could to the Saviour. There was always some awe mixed with it. But now I could love each equally. I felt as if

heaven was drawn near me, and glimpes of its glory were revealed.

"But soon this state of ecstasy was broken in upon by the stormy petrels which were flying around, and they would strike me in my face with their wings, treating me as dead. I wept like a child, it seemed so cruel; and to leave this earth with such feelings was hard. But the promise, 'My flesh and my heart faileth; but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever,' Psa. 73: 26, was one of many that chased away my pained feelings and made my spirit again rejoice.

"I remained in this state for a short time, when I thought that the greatest safety would be near the wreck, now far in the distance. I swam towards it about an hour, when I became quite exhausted. I then thought that heaven was not far distant. My legs stiffened and were immovable. My arms, as far as above my elbows, were helpless and cold. Chills large and awful were passing up my back, and my heart began to beat irregularly. Oh, I was cold, *very* cold. I knew death could not be far off; I remembered my friends in prayer; committed them to God's care, knowing that he would gladly watch over them and bless them. That was a 'prayer of faith.' After I finished praying, I said, this life is not worth such struggles, I cannot longer endure it. I bid my soul farewell, repeating those lines:

" 'Happy soul, thy days are ended,
All thy mourning days below;
Go, by angel guards attended,
To the sight of Jesus go.'

"The sun was still about two hours high, and gave me some warmth. I turned my face towards it, and I never before was so thankful for any temporal blessing as for the little warmth of that setting sun.

"Soon I found the struggle getting the mastery and too weak to sustain myself in my buoy-ring, I thought to pass through it to relieve my distress; but then the reflection that it was my duty to endure as long as possible, or else I would be committing suicide, and the natural shrinking from that last struggle, and the longing to let mother know that I died

happy, kept me from death, At this moment I was thrown up by a wave and saw a distant sail. But what good was this? I could not reach it, for I was unable to move, and I remained a few moments in suspense, Suddenly a thrill passed over my system, a revulsion took place, and the blood rushed through my body. I struck out and swam two hours more towards the bark.

"But Oh, there was a joy and peace within, such as I have never felt before. I did not wish to be saved, for I had friends in heaven as well as on earth. And besides meeting my Saviour, I knew that there was a dear parent there, and I longed to see him in glory; but he would not grieve over my delay, and I knew that mother would mourn my absence.

"Then too, I said to myself, as I was advancing towards the distant bark, 'There is some prayer now being answered in my behalf.' Can you doubt it, cousin? When I came within hailing distance of the vessel, I attempted to make a noise, and could not open my mouth. Oh, what feelings of regret that I struggled so long, to be deceived *at last*. 'I do not want to stay on this earth longer,' I said; and I felt like giving up. Still I swam on for a few moments, when I uttered a piercing scream that pained my ears, and continued hailing the vessel several times, each time when I was at the bottom of the wave, so that I could be seen as I rose to the top. The boat was soon sent out, and when I was placed within it I was unable to move hand or foot, but was perfectly conscious. When I reached the bark, a rope was put about me and I was drawn upon deck, and there they laid me as helpless as an infant.

"I asked myself, Has God indeed spared me? and for what? I had hoped to have awaked in heaven, but here I was still on earth; I almost sighed that I had been taken from those joys, from that ecstasy of feeling which I had in prospect of eternity."

The value of such an experimental testimony as the foregoing to the reality and divinity of the religion of the cross of Christ is incalculable. It is among the most powerful of all the Christian evidences. Infidelity can never answer, nor even reason plausibly against his consciousness of the inward force and

glory of our holy religion. Wit and argument, ribaldry and malice, are of no avail to destroy such evidence. Much less can unbelief produce results like these spiritual experiences in the hour of danger.

Yet many who are not infidels, particularly physicians and those who are familiar with scenes of sorrow and death, are disposed to cast heavy doubts upon the reality of those manifestations of grace and glory which are often granted to the sick and dying. Making all due allowance for the natural effects of weakness, disease, medicines, and mental hallucinations, we earnestly protest against the spirit which sees little or nothing more than these things in the workings of the grace of God in human souls that are passing under the rod, or out of this world.

In this very case it might be attributed to similar causes, to excitement, the known pleasing sensations of death by drowning, and other things. To all such suggestions we oppose the rescued sufferer's own positive declaration, namely.

"*There was no delusion in this experience. It was a matter of reason and faith, both triumphant in the peculiar and special presence of a precious Saviour.* I have before felt the first sensations of drowning, and know that they were peculiarly pleasant, but there was no drowning here. I had not swallowed a mouthful of water during my four hours of painful suspense; but it was the coldness of the water that was killing me, and which would produce no such deceitful sensations as those caused by partial drowning. My joys were those fresh and fragrant from heaven. It was Christ and his blessed attachment to his people that was shown in my case. I never knew that he loved me so much. I never thought that I could 'love him so strongly.' I found in that trying hour, when death was before me on that burning ship, 'the excellency of the knowledge of Christ.' I was four hours in the water, but those were four of the most precious hours of my life. Oh, so near my Saviour! I thank God for the privilege that I have had of passing through scenes which, though terrible in themselves, have strengthened my faith in him, and given me new views of eternity and eternal things."

This same witness declares, that in that dreadful hour it

was terrifying to observe the manifestations of ingratitude to God, and to hear the horrible blasphemies of some of those who were saved from the wreck. "Some who prayed when the flames were rushing on them, cursed when they were delivered." He has told us too of the utter despair of multitudes in that wild hour, and he has also given us evidence of the peaceful spirits and triumphant deaths of some of his fellow-sufferers.

He thus describes another scene in this calamity: "On board the Austria there were but few Christians, probably not more than twenty-five. There were some bold, wretched infidels. I saw the boldest and most heaven-defying of them all perish. The day before the disaster, tracts were distributed among the passengers, and were kindly received by most of them; but this man's depravity was not satisfied to receive one and destroy it before our faces, he stealthily gathered as many as he could from the passengers, and feasted on his shame that he had destroyed them. He was as bold as a lion when there was no danger near, but when God spoke the following day, he trembled at the alarm and was scarcely able to move. I saw him go overboard. He threw out his arms as he lay upon his back on the wave; his eyes seemed as if they would start from their sockets; the writhings of agony were seen in his features, and as he was sinking, the last I saw of him was, he clenched his hands, wringing them in agony, and he was just leaving earth for —— Oh, for what? A moment more, and could we have stood on the other side of the river of death, we might have heard the despairing cry, 'Oh, that I had been wise.' I wept when I saw this."

Contrasts like these are not to be accounted for by a doubt and a sneer, nor can the gathered hosts of unbelief reason or ridicule away this calm and clear testimony of an intelligent, educated, and thoroughly competent witness, who himself, but about four years ago, was an utter stranger and enemy to God and to these truths. Now he can say, "I believe, therefore do I speak what I have seen and heard and known and felt."

Study this narrative. It shows "*the excellency of the knowl-*

edge of Christ." "Unto you therefore which believe, he is precious."

It shows the power of the Christian faith to sustain a soul in the most sudden and severe calamities, producing entire submission to Providence, and turning sorrow into a joy for ever.

It teaches the exceeding greatness and preciousness of the blessed promises of the Bible, and the faithfulness of Him who hath promised.

It illustrates the necessity, the comfort, the power, the grace of prayer. Hundreds prayed then, and wanted others to pray for them, who seldom or never prayed before. A few of them at least "entered heaven with prayer," and some of the survivors, like this brother in Christ, know as they never knew before what that meaneth, "Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me." Do YOU PRAY?

It exemplifies the value of trial as a test of the strength and beauty of our Christian faith both in life and in death.

It brings you face to face with eternal things, and constitutes a new and powerful appeal for you to give all diligence to "make your calling and election sure."

Your ears still ring with these voices of sorrow from the sea. 'SUDDEN DEATH, SUDDEN GLORY," said a dying saint of a dead generation. But would it be such to you, my impenitent friend!

"Be ye therefore ready; for the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not." "Watch; for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come."

"Strive to enter in at the strait gate; for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able."

"Repent and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord." "He is able to save unto the uttermost all that come unto God by Him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them."

Sinner, come to Jesus. "Now is the accepted time; now is the day of salvation." We know nothing about *to-morrow.* Now; *now,* NOW. Perhaps *now or never?*

PREPARE TO MEET THY GOD.

Hollinger Corp.
pH 8.5